

VZCZCXRO3997
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #3120/01 3351254
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 011254Z DEC 09
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5597
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0928
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0369
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC//NSC//

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BAGHDAD 003120

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NSC, S. POWER
DEPT FOR USAID

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/23/2019

TAGS: [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQI REFUGEES AND IDPS: A/S SCHWARTZ AND NSC SR.
DIR POWER PRESS FOR GOI ACTION

Classified By: Sr. RefCoord Mark Storella, reasons 1.4 (b and d).

11. (SBU) The following is the second of two reporting cables on the visit to Iraq by the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) Assistant Secretary Eric Schwartz and National Security Council Senior Director and coordinator for Iraqi refugees and IDPs Samantha Power, who visited the country from November 14-15 and November 14 -17, respectively. They were accompanied by NSC Director Busby Scott Busby, PRM Special Assistant Elizabeth Drew, and PRM Program Officer Hilary Ingraham. The current cable reports on their meetings with Government of Iraq (GOI) officials, including Ambassador Sadiq Rikabi, advisor to the Prime Minister and GOI coordinator for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Refugees, Mohammad Salman, Chairman of the Implementation and Follow-up Committee on National Reconciliation (IFCNR), and Deputy Prime Minister Rafi al-Issawi. The visit resulted in a joint statement of shared commitment to addressing the needs of Iraq's displaced populations, and set the stage for the next phase of GOI and U.S. cooperation, particularly as regards the GOI-led initiative (with UN and U.S. support) to create conditions for returns in Diyala Governorate. Ensuring participation of refugees and IDPs in the upcoming elections will also pose challenges. The visit underscored that the upcoming period of political transition will be important for the displaced, but that government partners will be preoccupied with elections and government formation in the next months. Determining ways to engage effectively with that limitation will be an immediate challenge. End Summary.

- - - - -
Gaining GOI -- and Donor -- Buy In
- - - - -

12. (U) The visit had three objectives: to obtain an on-the-ground understanding of the reality of displacement in Iraq; to press the GOI for specific action and resource commitments to support their own displaced populations; and to launch an outreach campaign to engage other donors in support of Iraqi IDPs and refugees. Schwartz and Power held several meetings with Ambassador Sadiq Rikabi, a close advisor of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and the GOI coordinator on IDPs and refugees and IFCNR chief Salman. After Schwartz's departure on November 15, Power held meetings with Deputy Prime Minister Rafi al-Issawi and Dr. Abdul Samid Rahman Sultan, the Minister of Migration and Displacement. Representatives from Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and Australia attended many of the meetings.

- - - - -
Help us help you, Ambassador Rikabi
- - - - -

13. (C) Schwartz and Power held several extended meetings with Rikabi, including a formal meeting, a luncheon, a private dinner, and a meeting that included Rikabi, IFCNR's Salman, the UN and donor representatives. Much of the discussion revolved around seeking greater resource commitments from the GOI to assist with IDPs and refugees. "We will do more as you do more," Power said, emphasizing that there is much potential for returns due to the security situation, but that donor legislatures are more likely to be generous if they can see a commitment by the GOI. "Help us help you." A/S Schwartz also pressed for a GOI contribution to UNHCR's Iraq operations or to support refugees in neighboring countries as Operations or to support refugees in neighboring countries as an important symbolic gesture.

14. (C) Rikabi deflected these appeals. "It is necessary to focus on how to move forward, not just focus on what (the GOI) will do," he said. "Our capacity is limited... and we can't even solve the problems for all (the rest) of our people." Rikabi then asserted that international organizations were not coordinating: "My questions is, where are your efforts?" he asked. "Are they part of a plan, or are you working alone and ... just taking note of our work?" Rikabi said he wished to see practical solutions involving those already providing assistance, and wanted to see all implementers and donors working "in one stream."

15. (SBU) Rikabi also focused on the numbers of Iraqi IDPs and refugees, arguing that figures were inflated and were being used against the GOI for political purposes. He then suggested the creation of a committee to conduct a census and identify the number of IDPs. To this, UNHCR representative Daniel Endres asserted that UNHCR is confident of its figure

BAGHDAD 00003120 002 OF 004

of 1.5 million IDPs, down from 1.9 million at the beginning of 2008. In his meeting with donors, Rikabi made no outright appeals for resources. He concluded the donor meeting by noting that Iraq is a rich country, but that Saddam Hussein had wasted its resources fighting wars and killing Iraqis. He did, however, fully agree with the initiative in Diyala in which GOI, U.S. and UN efforts are coordinated to create conditions for returns. He then suggested looking at other provinces after the IDP and refugee challenge of Diyala is "solved." (Note: The USG strategy, in fact, envisions simultaneously focusing on several areas where interventions can lead to sustainable returns -- Diyala, as well as several neighborhoods in Baghdad. We will follow up with him and other GOI principals about this. End note.)

- - - - -
Issawi: You Care More than the GOI
- - - - -

16. (C) Following A/S Schwartz's departure, Power also met with DPM Issawi on November 17. Issawi, the highest ranking Sunni in the government aside from Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, lashed out at the Shi'a dominated government for its lack of attention to IDP and refugee issues. When Power asked for Issawi's views on displacement issues, he responded that that the Shi'a-dominated GOI has actively sought to make the demographic changes wrought by displacement and violence permanent. This benefits Shi'a parties, he implied, because most of the displaced -- and particularly Iraqi refugees, who have been almost entirely ignored by the GOI -- are Sunnis. He noted that he had supported a large increase in the MODM budget, even though the minister had never explained how he intended to use it during budget discussions. Officials have consistently underestimated the needs of the displaced populations. Rikabi's appointment as the Iraqi coordinator for the displaced has also served to further politicize the issue, he said. "The psychology of the politicians is worse than the psychology of the communities," Issawi asserted, agreeing with Power that many communities themselves are ready to welcome back their former neighbors and that security has improved enough to encourage many returns.

"Other than security there is no encouragement for them to return," he said. In Issawi's opinion, the only solution to the highly charged sectarian political atmosphere in the country was to encourage a liberal-sectarian political model in Iraq. Concluding the meeting, Issawi thanked the United States for its efforts. "Please keep working," he said.

- - - - -
Ministry of Displacement
- - - - -

17. (SBU) NSC Sr. Director Power and Director Busby participated with donors in a meeting with MODM Minister Sultan. Sultan said he greatly appreciated international interest and support and briefed on the IDP situation, stating that there have been a total of 46,000 family returns in total and 30,000 in 2009. Of the total number of IDPs, 73 percent of Iraq's IDPs came from Baghdad, and two-thirds of the returns had been to Baghdad. About 8,000 of the returns in 2009 had returned to Diyala. Primary needs were water, reconstruction of destroyed housing, and employment, he noted, adding that the Ministry's Human Security Program to provide small loans and do other income generating projects, can address just 1% of the need. He noted that the Prime Qcan address just 1% of the need. He noted that the Prime Minister had recently issued an order for Iraqi security forces to stop evicting people from their homes and that the overall approach by the GOI was to address all Iraqi vulnerability, not just the displaced. "We have to look at everyone as a group to help. In 2007 and 2008, the government priority was to create safety and security. We achieved that. In the new stage we are looking at services for all Iraqis." In response to a question from Busby about the prospects for donating the Chikook settlement land to the IDPs there, Sultan said the idea contradicted the city plan. "But (donating land to them) is the challenge and the plan," he said. Finally, Sultan said that the Finance Ministry has been unwilling to release funds allocated to compensation for those impacted by sectarian violence, though a compensation law was passed and money was allocated. (Comment: Donating land to the Chikook and other urban IDPs would be a positive step and is something Post will follow up on. We have also encountered the issue of the Finance Ministry not releasing funds, part of a general pattern of poor budget execution in the GOI. End Comment.)

BAGHDAD 00003120 003 OF 004

18. (SBU) Sultan noted the challenges of creating a Ministry from scratch in 2003. The budget had increased over 100 fold since its inception, and Sultan, minister since 2006, had hired 735 staff members, he said.

- - - - -
Wrap-Up Meeting with UNHCR and Donors
- - - - -

19. (SBU) Busby, UNHCR Iraq Representative Daniel Endres and Iraq Director Andrew Harper, and all of the donor representatives expressed optimism and pleasant surprise about the potential for sustainable returns at a wrap-up meeting on November 17. UNHCR's Endres led this meeting, emphasizing that though Iraq will one day be a wealthy country, the trip should demonstrate the need now for continued support. Geneva-based Dutch representative Carola Baller emphasized that none of the Diyala villagers or Provincial Council representative interviewed mentioned security as a concern. Jobs, she emphasized were the main need in places such as Diyala. Melbourne-based AusAID representative Joel Thorpe said he was particularly encouraged by the engagement of provincial and community officials in Diyala, as well as with UNHCR's relationships with GOI officials. He found the trip useful because he was able to see better how displacement issues fit into the GOI's overall set of priorities. Still, Swedish representative Ulrika Joseffson said, a large challenge was GOI engagement.

Sweden has been very interested in displacement issues in Iraq but has been unable to be more active because of its small presence in Iraq. Other donors reiterated the problem of access to the field and their limited presence and emphasized that they were greatly appreciative of U.S. and UN efforts to organize and lend resources to this visit. Both the Swedish and Dutch representatives indicated the strong political interest in their countries at present in return programs for failed Iraqi asylum seekers. Finally, Harper approached RefCoord after the meeting to say that the agency might be able to get Australia to make the first contribution to the Diyala initiative.

- - - - -
UN Security Restrictions Post Obstacles
- - - - -

¶10. (SBU) For all donors and UNHCR, the security environment and associated restrictions have limited the ability of personnel to visit the field, hindering assessment and conditions and oversight of projects. At an early meeting with donors and UNCHR, UNHCR's Endres outlined security restrictions that have hampered the agencies ability to operate. UN personnel can only travel in armored humvees or mine-resistant, ambush protected (MRAP) vehicles, he said. Any international staffer must obtain approval for a trip outside the International Zone in Baghdad seven days in advance from the UN's Department of Safety and Security (DSS) (something that DSS has not provided in more than two months). And UN personnel must travel with the personal security detail (PSD), even if they are travelling under the protection of U.S. forces. These rules are more restrictive than those that apply to U.S. Government officials. Power offered her assistance advocating on behalf of more realistic security guidelines with the UN in New York, and Endres responded that just creating a proviso that UN personnel can travel with U.S. forces, eliminating the need for approval Qtravel with U.S. forces, eliminating the need for approval from New York would be a huge step forward. Eliminating the need for the PSD when travelling with the U.S. military and allowing travel in armored sport-utility vehicles would also be helpful, he said.

- - - - -
Comment
- - - - -

¶11. (C) While it is generally a hopeful moment for Iraq's displaced populations because of ongoing security improvements, further engagement from the GOI will be necessary before many displaced persons return to their homes. GOI resources need to be increased to meet their needs, procedures allowing them to access resources need to be simplified, and displaced persons need more information about the resources available to them. Unfortunately, with Iraq's national elections around the corner, much of the GOI will be consumed with campaigning and government formation for the next several months. Indeed, meetings with Ambassador Rikabi and other senior officials were

BAGHDAD 00003120 004 OF 004

disappointing because they clearly were reluctant to make any new commitments. Despite an expected low level of engagement by central authorities, we will need to identify means to make progress on government engagement and take concrete actions to support voluntary returns. Post will work with our international partners and GOI officials, including those at the local level, to tackle these challenges. End Comment.

¶12. (U) This cable was cleared with A/S Schwartz and NSC Sr. Director Power.
FORD